

Stroud Fringe Festival 2017

Background

Stroud Fringe festival has been running for a number of years now, but this year the festival seemed to be a bigger success with regard to the amount of people that attended. The main reasons for the popularity was a combination of good weather and the wide variety of acts across the town centre. In addition to this the organisers arranged a Glamping site which was sited in Stratford Park.

Planning

Throughout the year following the 2016 event, Environmental Health & Licensing have arranged numerous meetings with the organisers, the Police and other agencies. During this period Community & Facilities and Public Spaces have been kept involved. The event was submitted to Stroud District Safety Advisory Group (SAG) so that all agencies involved had sight of the event plans.

Staffing for the event weekend

Due to the popularity of the event and the issues raised from last year's debrief, it was felt that SDC staff should attend the event over the weekend. The staff that attended to monitor this year's event was made up from Environmental Protection, Licensing, Communities & Facilities and phone contact with Public Spaces. These staff patrolled around the town and its outer locations to ensure that the events were safe, within their permitted numbers, not causing noise nuisance and finished at the agreed time. Further to this, over the weekend we had two Neighbourhood Wardens in conjunction with the car park supervisor who patrolled in pairs and assisted with parking and first aid.

Performance Stages

The main stages that were held within the town were located in Bank Gardens, Cornhill, St Lawrence Church, Fawkes Place (Block Party) and the Ecotricity stage by the Canal. In addition to this there were a large number of events that were going on that were not part of the Fringe Festival organisers' remit and these attracted audiences ranging from 450 down to 70.

Apart from minor amendments/adjustments to some of the stages, the event generally went off very successfully with little incident and a great atmosphere.

However, the Block Party event that was scheduled to take place on both the Saturday and Sunday in Fawkes Place, located to the rear of the Stroud Subscription Rooms did cause concern. The event had a licence for an audience of 1000 people each night. However, before the Saturday event started the Head of Fringe Security discussed various concerns with the organisers and agreed to reduce the numbers to 700 going to a maximum of 800 following a risk review. The main reason for this was due to the amended location of the stage and the amount of room the bar took up.

COMMUNITY SERVICES & LICENSING COMMITTEE
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The event started at approximately 18:00 and was scheduled to finish at 22:30. However, at around 20:30 SDC staff were called to the Block Party event to assist the Security team, the Police and the organisers as the crowds had grown to a unmanageable level. At one point during the event there were 950 attendees within the licensed area and approximately 600 people at the entrance and around by the adjacent church. As result of this, crushing started within the crowd outside the event and young children were witnessed being handed over people's heads as they were at greatest risk. To assist in preventing further risk, SDC staff and Police got between the crowds trying to access the Block Party and tried to get them pushed back, this worked to a point. Also, to try and get the message across to the crowds SDC and the Police went onto the stage to address the crowds, as this was not undertaken effectively by the organisers when requested to do so. Some of the people that could not access the event pushed their way in the area between the heras fencing and Stroud Congregational Church and were then pushing against the fencing and hoarding. Others were sat and stood on top of the wall adjacent to the entrance into Fawkes Place. An additional concern was the emergency exit which was at the far end of Fawkes place which was unlit. Once the event concluded, SDC and the Police arranged a meeting with the organisers of the Block Party as well as the Fringe Festival. At this meeting it was eventually agreed to cancel the Sunday night Block Party due to safety fears.

Litter

Throughout the weekend there were a number of ongoing problems with litter. This was mainly due to the amount of people at the event. The organisers had agreed to have a good number of stewards undertaking litter picking sweeps. Public Spaces provided a large amount of litter pickers to the event, however only a handful of these were used. It further transpired that pre-arranged visits by Ubico to remove collected waste over the course of the weekend were insufficient to keep on top of the litter produced.

Debrief

Following the Fringe Festival event SDC officers called a debrief that was attended by all SDC officers involved, Barry Wyatt, Director of Development Services, Police Licensing and the Police Inspector for Stroud. A full debrief involving the organisers of the Stroud Fringe was held recently and the points below were raised.

The following points were raised and discussed during debrief and will be raised with the organisers:

- Drinking on the streets - this still continued even though organisers and Police had been briefed to prevent drinks being taken out of licensed premises. A confused message from the Police at the event was raised in that it was suggested that Police advised door supervisors during the event that alcohol could be taken out of pubs . Prior to the event Police Licensing and SDC Licensing had attended a meeting for licensed premises in the town and

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requested that businesses did not allow alcohol to be taken out of their premises and that only plastic glasses were used. Those premises that did not attend were all visited personally by Lottie Parry from Police Licensing.

- Door Staff at some premises not coming on duty until 21:00, which also hampered the street drinking ban being enforced.
- The volume of entertainment noise in the Subscription Rooms was such that the building windows were shaking on the Friday night.
- During the evenings people were stood in George Street, particularly outside Meme and were at risk from traffic. This is the main route for taxis coming from the taxi rank who reported difficulty getting safety through this area.
- Litter - as mentioned above the litter was a problem. Discussed the possibility of parking two refuse lorries within the Town next year to assist. Organisers to cover costs of this next year.
- Under age drinking in the Star Anise
- Lack of stewards - this has been a problem in previous years and continued to be so as they are volunteers
- Some stages went over the permitted numbers (Cornhill on Sunday)
- Organisers' event management plans, premises licence applications and temporary event notices were submitted too late again, even though organisers were told that this needed to improve from 2016.
- Organisers were asked to put Heras fencing around the bridge on the canal, but didn't. Potential fall risk into the canal.
- Block Party venue - it was agreed by everyone in the debrief that Fawkes Place is not a safe venue for this type of event.

Recommendations

- Next year the Fringe Festival and associated events should be referred to a formal sitting of Stroud SAG
- Block Party should be a ticketed event
- Some other stages should also be ticketed entry
- Subscription Rooms unsuitable for "after party" into early hours of morning.
- Potential road closures to further separate attendees from traffic, e.g. George Street.
- Revisions to litter collection arrangements.
- Toilet arrangements to be provided to cater for Bank Gardens.